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ON ST. PAUL'S SENSE OF
SOUNDNESS IN RELIGION.

A
DISCOURSE

DELIVERED BEFORE AN
ASSEMBLY
OF
Protestant-dissenting Ministers,
AT HALIFAX,
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MDCCLXXXI.

TO
THE REVEREND MINISTERS,
BEFORE WHOM
THIS DISCOURSE WAS DELIVERED,
AND AT WHOSE REQUEST
IT IS NOW MADE PUBLIC,
THIS DISCOURSE
IS INSCRIBED
BY THEIR
OBEDIENT SERVANT,



DISCOURSE.

TITUS ii. 1.

BUT SPEAK THOU THE THINGS WHICH BE-
COME SOUND DOCTRINE.

THE principal design of this epistle is to assert the indispensable necessity of an innocent and amiable character, of a virtuous and useful behaviour from all who profess the christian faith, and entertain the hopes proposed in the gospel—to shew how the peculiar doctrines of christianity lead men to cultivate every excellent disposition of the heart, and exhibit in practice every generous and worthy deed in their power.

THE Apostle had left Titus in Crete to instruct the converts in that Island, more

perfectly, in the design, principles and duties of their religion, and to establish regular churches and ministers among them; and with the same view he now exhorts him to employ every method, and improve every opportunity to inculcate on the believers the necessity of adorning their profession by a conscientious performance of all moral virtues, or good works, becoming them as men and christians, and suitable to their respective ranks, ages, and other circumstances.

Two considerations made it peculiarly necessary for the Apostle to insist on this subject on this occasion.

I. THE general and *national* bad character of the Cretans, whom antient writers agree to reproach as a very profligate people; particularly, as addicted to piracy and plunder. So notorious were they for vices, that, as the Apostle observes (chap. I. ver. 12:) a poet of their own (Epimenides) had truly stigmatized them as addicted to lying, deceit, cruelty, intemperance and gluttony. — “The Cretans are always liars, evil-beasts, slow-

“flow-bellies;” or rather, as the original word may signify, swift, fierce, or voracious bellies. This rendered it much more difficult to reform the Christian converts in Crete from those common vices to which they had been habituated so long, and made it necessary that they should be rebuked severely, when guilty of such practices; that, at length, they might become *sound in the faith*, i. e. might behave holily and unblameably—in a manner becoming the gospel truths and doctrines they professed to embrace.

2. THE other unhappy circumstance was this—that some false teachers had crept in among them, and obtained too much countenance and success, even to the subverting whole houses (ch. I. 11.) These men, it seems, taught doctrines more complaisant and commodious to the lusts and passions of mankind, than the true doctrines of the Gospel. They made great abatements, both in their own practice, and in their instructions to others, from that compleat reformation of the heart and life from all sin, and that strictness of purity and holiness which

which the Apostle, according to the truth of the Gospel, had required of them.

As to their own corrupt principles, designs, and practices, the Apostle thus characterizeth them (ch. I. 10, 11.) as *unruly, and vain-talkers and deceivers—who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake.* And (v. 15, 16.) as *defiled and unbelieving (or unfaithful) to whom nothing is pure, but even their mind and conscience is defiled. Professing to know God, but in works deny him: being abominable and disobedient; and to every good work reprobate.*

As to their instructions to the people—in order to captivate their attention and applause, they amused them with a number of idle* jewish fables and rabbinical fictions (v. 14). And further to secure the success of their own mean and selfish views, they filled

* Such as about the Messiah, as an earthly king—about the first resurrection on this earth—about the war of Gog and Magog—about Behemoth and Leviathan, and such like.—see Grotius on the text.

filled their heads with a set of curious philosophical disquisitions, and taught them to dispute upon subtile questions. By these means they secured to themselves veneration, as men of wonderfully profound knowledge, and inspired their followers with no little vanity upon their fancied attainments in science, tho' falsely so called. And, as they were principally of the judaizing faction, they were full of those allegorical interpretations, and nice distinctions, founded on certain passages of the law of Moses, of which the Jews were then excessively fond, and of which all the following jewish writers are so full. They also laid great stress on the observance of the traditions of the Elders, containing multitudes of frivolous injunctions concerning meats, purifications, and many other such like things. And lastly, they insisted much on the authenticity and importance of the Jewish genealogies, upon account of the privileges supposed to be inherited by the true descendants from the Patriarchs. * All
which

* E. G. they taught that all the true Israelites would have a share in the future world. See Grot. on ch. I. 13.

which things the Apostle pronounceth *unprofitable and vain* (ch. III. 9.) and as *turning away the truth* (ch. I. 14.) For by thus amusing the people's imaginations with fables, disputations, and speculative subtilties, they put *the Truth* out of their sight, and caused them to neglect the capital purpose and business of the Christian institution, viz. to *purify themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit,* and engage them to *perfect holiness in the fear of God.*

THESE were most dangerous deceivers, likely to do a great deal of mischief amongst a sensual people, so strongly attached already to many corrupt practices and sinful habits; and therefore it was very necessary that their *mouths should be stopped* by a precise and explicit declaration of the true nature and design of the gospel, and of those terms on which alone christians may hope to obtain acceptance with God, and everlasting salvation.

LET us see then what account St. Paul gives of the nature and design of the Gospel

pel in this epistle. In the first chap. (first and second verses) he briefly asserts it to be—*The truth which is after Godliness in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began*—or in other words—the true revelation of God's will and grace to mankind, enforcing on them the practice of universal goodness, in hope of immortal life, assured to them by the faithful promise of God.

THIS he expresseth more at large, (ch. II. 11, &c.) *The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.* These are the fundamental principles and purposes of the gospel, which he enjoins Titus in the 15th verse to *speake, or teach, and exhort* all his hearers to acknowledge and con-

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form

form to them, *and to rebuke* all who taught or practiced contrary to them *with all authority.*

HERE you see, expressed in terms as plain as can be devised, what are the Apostle's sentiments concerning the grand design of the Gospel dispensation of God's grace, or favour, now revealed to Mankind, offering salvation to all men, and what was the purpose of Christ's undertaking, and of all which he taught, did, and suffered in the execution of it, viz. To reclaim mankind from the practice of all manner of wickedness, and engage them to a conscientious discharge of the several obligations of righteousness, purity, and piety. He makes the Essence of christianity to consist in the purification of the heart, and conformity of the life to the laws of universal goodness, in assured expectation of Christ's second coming to judge all men in righteousness, and bestow eternal life on all his faithful followers.

BUT,

BUT, as if the Apostle feared he had not yet been sufficiently explicit and clear on this important subject, or, at least, desired, if possible, to impress it deeper, he returns to it in the third Chapter (the third and following verses); where, after having given a deplorable representation of the depraved dispositions and practices of mankind before the coming of Christ, and pointed at the measures which *the kindness and love of God towards man* induced him freely to take for their redemption, by means of the institutions of the Gospel and the plentiful effusion of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, in order *that being justified*, or made righteous, *by his grace, we might be made heirs in respect of the hope of eternal life*—he adds v. 8. *This is a faithful saying*—it is a true doctrine and may be firmly depended on—and *these things I will, that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God*—all the converts to christianity—*might be careful to maintain good works; these are good and profitable to men*: which last clause seems to me to be intended as explanatory of what he meant by *good works*—these are— all such

works as are good in themselves, and must be approved as such by every rational mind of man, and are moreover profitable to men—to those who practice them, to those who are concerned in them, and in general to human society.

THESE are the doctrines which through this whole epistle St. Paul inculcates as the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel; specifying several of the particular duties, suitable to several cases and circumstances of individuals, and comprized under the forementioned general heads. He requireth the ministers of the gospel diligently to explain, and earnestly to impress them on their hearers; but all curious questions, subtle speculations, and matters of contention and debate—high and mysterious points of pretended divinity, which have no tendency to promote sobriety, righteousness and godliness, and the practice of those good works which are good in themselves, and profitable to men, he represents as unprofitable and vain. In like manner, all those commandments of men which enjoin ritual

ritual observances and human constitutions, and encourage the observers to place an unwarrantable dependance on external modes and devices ; or which tend to give an undue importance to things of no intrinsic worth, and thereby to take off the attention of christians from the practical purposes of a good heart and life ; or to countenance and encourage them in the indulgence of their lusts, and neglect of real duties ; he warns us against as *turning away the truth*—subverting real christianity—of mischievous tendency, and which every one ought resolutely to reject and condemn.

SUCH were the doctrines unhappily propagated among the Cretans, which he censures with so much indignation in the close of the first chapter, and in opposition to which he immediately proceeds to charge Titus in the words of the text—*But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine.*

IN considering these words I apprehend it will be well worth our while to enquire carefully what is the Apostle's meaning
when

when he so often speaks in this epistle concerning *Soundness* in matters of religion—which I conceive, from the manifest drift and tenor of the whole epistle, to be this—
A sincere and steadfast belief in the gospel, and a faithful representation of it to others, as a divine institution of the grace of God, by the mediation of Jesus Christ, for reforming mankind from sin, and engaging them diligently to practise all holiness; or to conduct their lives in sincere obedience to the precepts of the gospel, requiring piety towards God, purity in ourselves, and righteousness and goodness to all men: animated hereto by a firm belief in the promises which God hath made us by Jesus Christ, a steadfast expectation of a future judgment at Christ's appearing in Glory, and an efficacious hope of eternal life from him.—Thus to believe, and thus to practice, is to be sound in the faith, and to teach and exhort others to believe these things, and thereupon to practice their proper duties is to teach sound doctrine—according to the Apostle's sense of the words.

ON

ON the contrary—to amuse ourselves with difficult questions, speculative notions, and zealous contentions about high and mysterious points, of little or no tendency to improve the heart or amend the practice; or to adopt and place a dependance upon the precepts, observances, and ordinances of men, or on any external rites, privileges, and practices, to the neglect and prejudice of practical goodness—is *to be unsound in the faith*.—And to pervert the attention and abuse the credulity of others by teaching them such unprofitable and vain matters, and thereby to take them off from a due regard to the substantial and indispensable duties of holiness in heart and life, is *to teach unsound doctrine*.

To be satisfied that this is a fair representation of the Apostle's sense of *soundness* in religion, turn with me, if you please, to the several passages of this epistle, where he useth the term.

CHAP. I. v. 9th. After having enumerated, in the preceeding verses, many amiable

able graces and virtues which ought to adorn the spirit and character of him who is to be admitted to the office of the christian ministry—such as, that he *must be blameless*, and not chargeable with riot and disorderly practices; *not self-willed*; *not soon angry*; *not given to wine*; *no striker*; *not given to filthy lucre*; *but a lover of hospitality*; *a lover of good men* (or good things) *sober, chaste, holy, temperate*: he adds further—that he must also *hold fast the faithful word which he hath been taught*, that he *may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers*. Now, what can the Apostle mean here by *sound doctrine*, and *the faithful word which he hath been taught*—but, a just representation of the true principles, duties and promises of the gospel, as it was delivered by Christ and his Apostles? What that was, he himself tells us plainly enough, when he defines it to be—*the truth which is after godliness in hope of eternal life* (Ch. I. 1, 2.) and represents its purport to be, *to teach us, that denying all ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present*

sent world; looking for that blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. This is the faithful word which the christian minister hath received from Christ and his Apostles, and must hold fast. With this he must exhort and convince gainsayers. And who are so fit to teach a gospel of such reforming, purifying, sanctifying, and practical tendency—who can be so able to preach this sound doctrine with due authority, and effectually to exhort their hearers to embrace and conform to it—or who can with so good a countenance exhort and convince gainsayers—as men who shew that they heartily believe this gospel themselves; by exemplifying the principles and spirit of it in their own tempers and lives? In short—as men of that excellent character and behaviour which the Apostle had just described, and required in those who were to be admitted to the office of Presbyters, or Bishops, in the churches?

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INDEED,

INDEED, it is only men of such characters, in some good measure, who can, with any propriety, grace, or reasonable probability of success, undertake to persuade others *to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly*; or, in the Apostle's words, *to preach sound gospel doctrine*. For maintaining subtle, mysterious, speculative doctrines—matters of meer opinion and faith only; for propagating whimsical fancies and suggestions of idle speculatists; for upholding the injunctions of human authority; the qualifications which the Apostle enumerates do not appear so necessary, but another kind of furniture seems more suitable. These things, therefore, can be no part of the sound doctrine he speaks of, nor doth he represent these things as any part of christianity, or of the business of christian ministers through this whole epistle.

BESIDES, what were the gainsayers who must be exhorted and convinced?—He immediately tells us—they were a set of men of profligate characters and bad designs,

v. 10. Now certainly such men were not to be encountred with speculative doctrines and articles of meer faith alone; but with practical precepts and admonitions: or, as the Apostle speaks, were to be *exhorted and convinced*—convinced of their wickedness, and exhorted to a better practice. They were *unruly*, and *vain-talkers and deceivers*, who *subverted whole houses*; teaching things which they ought not for *filthy lucre's sake*, and with this view countenanced the Cretans in their national and habitual vices of lying, cruelty, and voluptuousness; diverting their attention from the reforming spirit and practical business of christianity, to things unprofitable and vain. Therefore Titus is required to *rebuke them sharply*—for their personal immoralities, and for countenancing the immoralities of others.

THE Apostle adds v. 13.—*that they may be found in the faith*—where again it is plain he means—not soundness in any speculative doctrines of faith, for that sort of *unsoundness* is not the subject of his complaint either against the Cretans or their deceivers—but

a sincere conformity, in temper and practice, to the purity and holiness which the gospel requires, and to which they had been hitherto very much strangers. For you see, these gainsayers and deceivers are charged here, not so much with speculative errors in judgement, as practical wickedness of heart and life. In this consisted their unsoundness, and therefore for this they must *be reprov'd sharply*, that they might reform and become at length *sound in the faith*.

In the 14th and following verses, he further chargeth them with giving heed to jewish fables and commandments of men that turn away the truth, i. e. tend to divert people from regarding properly the true nature and design of the gospel, and from that which is the great business of all who profess the Gospel—sincere obedience and holiness. He further suggests that they were *defiled and unbelieving, to whom nothing is pure; but their very mind and conscience is defiled*, i. e. corrupted by the evil principles, of vicious and immoral tendency, which they have adopted, and which, in fact, made them

them wicked upon principle. *They profess to know God, but in works deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and to every good work reprobate.* Such is the character he gives of the gainsayers, and unsound in the faith, who were to be *exhorted, convinced, and rebuked sharply.* Whence it is easy to see what he means by sound doctrine, and whom he reckons sound in the faith.

BUT that by sound doctrine the Apostle means the preaching of the practical duties of christianity, or inculcating on mankind a conscientious and persevering performance of those duties of sobriety, righteousness, and godliness, which the Gospel requires from all its professors, appears, I think, still more evidently from the charge to Titus in the words of my text, which he immediately subjoins to the description he had given of the deceivers who were unsound in the faith.—*But speak thou the things that become sound doctrine.*

WELL—how must he speak the things which become doctrine—and what are those things?

things?—By inculcating on his hearers those christian graces and moral duties which are suited to their several ages, sexes, circumstances, and conditions in life, and which the Gospel, *that teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly*, indispenfibly requires them to practice respectively. But hear the Apostle explain himself—

But teach thou the things that become sound doctrine, particularly—that the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in the faith, i. e. as we saw in the former chapter, steadily maintaining a profession of christianity as a practical institution, and conforming their lives to it, in expectation of Christ's coming to judgment, and hope of eternal life by him, according to God's promise—sound in the faith, in charity, in patience—* then follow the duties of aged women, v. 3.
—next

* Or perhaps the original words may mean here, *sound or uncorrupt in fidelity*, fulfilling every just demand or reasonable expectation from their integrity and honesty in matters of trust, which are more usually confided to elderly persons.

—next the duties of younger women, v. 4.
 5—afterwards the duties of young men, v. 6.
 then Titus's own duties as a minister, and
 of all other ministers, v. 7, 8.—afterwards
 the duties of servants to their masters, v. 9,
 10.—in the beginning of the third chapter
 he specifies the duties of subjects to magis-
 trates, and lastly, the common duties of
 benevolence and peaceableness which all
 men owe one to another.

HERE we have a concise, but compre-
 hensive abstract of personal and social vir-
 tues, as well as ministerial duties, and these
 are the things, which, in our Apostle's opi-
 nion, become, or are consonant to, sound
 doctrine, and which in the text he charges
 Titus to speak and inculcate; and in the
 last verse of this second chapter he repeats
 the charge—*These things speak and exhort*
all persons to observe and practice, and re-
buke gainsayers and transgressors with all au-
thority, and in so doing let no man despise
thee. This kind of preaching is that *sound*
speech which he says, v. 8, *cannot be condem-*
ed, and he says very truly; for all persons,
 who

who are not of abandoned principles and corrupted hearts indeed, must own the reasonableness and obligation of practising these duties, and consequently the propriety of explaining and inculcating them. And when this is done by persons who take care (as he says, v. 7.) *in all things to shew themselves patterns of the good works* they recommend to others, and in their doctrines *shew uncorruptness, gravity, and sincerity*, well may *he who is of the contrary part*, or who opposes and decries them *be ashamed of his perverseness, having no evil thing to say of them.*

Thus I have referred you to all the passages in this Epistle, where the Apostle speaks of *soundness in faith, doctrine, or speech*, and I think his meaning in those expressions appears every where very plain. If it were necessary further to confirm the sense I have understood them in, I might refer you also to two other passages, which I think are the only ones, besides those I have already taken notice of, where this mode of speaking is used, either in St. Paul's epistles, or the whole New Testament,

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ONE is 1 Timothy I. 9, 10. where having observed that *the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane*—to restrain them from their enormities, and having enumerated several sorts of great and heinous sinners, he adds—*and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine*—where he manifestly means—not speculative points of opinion and faith, but doctrines that forbid all sorts of wickedness, and which enjoin universal holiness and goodness. These he accounts the sound doctrines, for to these the corruptions and vices he had just mentioned, and all like them, are diametrically contrary.

THE other passages is 2 Tim. IV. 3. where he foretells that a time will come, when many who profess christianity *will not endure sound doctrine*, i. e. will not bear to have their duty faithfully explained and inculcated, and their vices exposed and re-proved, in the manner wherein he had, in the preceding verse, required Timothy to

D *preach*

preach the word, to be instant in season and out of season, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with all long suffering and doctrine.

For that the Apostle doth not mean here, by sound doctrine, speculative opinions, and matters of faith only, nor argumentive defences of subtile notions, is plain from what follows.—*But after their own lusts*—i. e. excited by their attachments to their own wicked lusts and passions, and with a view to be countenanced, or at least not disturbed in the further gratification of them—*they shall heap to themselves teachers*—who will be more delicate and complaisant, and careful not to be too severe upon these tender points, their favourite lusts,—*having itching ears*; and *they shall turn away their ears from the truth*—because it is become disagreeable to them, in that it condemns them, and *shall be turned into fables*, i. e. to things *unprofitable and vain*; calculated rather to amuse and stupify, than to alarm their consciences, therefore better suited to the cases of persons who are governed by their lusts, and resolved to continue so.

ALAS!

ALAS! a great deal of notion and fanciful speculation—a great deal of refinement and mysticism in religion—a great deal of disputation and zeal for accuracy in points of faith, and a thousand abstruse and enigmatical forms of expression, wherein to wrap up all, are by no means incommodious or troublesome to unmortified lusts and head-strong passions—nay are often chosen as a convenient commutation for the more difficult work of *keeping the heart with all diligence—of thinking on their ways, and turning their feet unto God's testimonies—of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, and living soberly, righteously, and godly.*

You see the persons of whom the Apostle here speaks, are represented as entertaining an antipathy to *sound doctrine*, through the prevalence of their lusts and passions; consequently, what he means by *sound doctrine* here, as well as in all the other places, is that doctrine which opposeth the lusts and passions. And what is that?—but the doctrine which requires men to subdue their lusts and passions, and to refrain from all

criminal gratifications of them, and to cultivate universal holiness, purity, and goodness: so that here also, as well as every where else, the Apostle means by *sound doctrine*, the practical doctrines and duties of the gospel.

UPON the whole—the words *sound* and *corrupt* are terms of opposite signification, and of similar import with *right* and *wrong*, *good* and *evil*, *virtuous* and *vicious*, *laudable* and *shameful*. It is well known that by the word *corrupt*, when applied to characters and manners, both the moral and sacred writers uniformly mean wrong, vicious, evil, and shameful dispositions and practices; by *sound*, therefore, they must intend what is right, good, virtuous and laudable in temper and conduct.

THAT then is *sound doctrine*, which tends to make them *sound*, who hear, consider, and embrace it—to cure them of their vices, to correct their corrupt lusts and passions, to reform their evil manners, and to restore them to a healthy, vigorous state of soul,
well-

well-disposed, and active in discharging the several duties of life.—But that is *unsound* doctrine that hath no reforming influence, but rather tends to amuse the imagination, than to enlighten the understanding—to stupify, than to alarm the conscience—to swell the heart with pride, than to cure it of evil dispositions—and to encourage sinners to promise themselves peace and safety, tho' they go on still in their trespasses.

He is *sound in the faith* of the Gospel, who firmly believes it to be a manifestation of the mercy and grace of God for reforming and saving a sinful world; and, in correspondence with its design, and obedience to its precepts, earnestly endeavours to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, animated by a steadfast expectation of the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and a joyful hope of obtaining eternal life from him, according to his promise. But he is *unsound in the faith*—whatever he may

may pretend to believe—whatever noise he may make about believing—whatever zeal he may exert in contending for his faith—or whatever vanity he may assume on this ground—who lives in the habitual commission of any sin or neglect of any duty :—who is guilty of falsehood, fraud, deceit, or treachery—who is hard-hearted and cruel—who is envious, or malicious; relentless and implacable—who is addicted to censoriousness and backbiting—who is proud and vain-glorious—who indulges headstrong passions, or intemperate and greedy appetites—who is ungrateful or avaricious—or, in the Apostle's words, *if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine*—i. e. to the doctrines and precepts of the Gospel.*

THERE

* Some have thought that the maxim of our celebrated poet ought to be admitted, with an allowance for poetical licence.

For modes of faith let angry bigots fight ;

His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right.—POPE.

But perhaps it will be brought into nearer conformity with the sentiments of St. Paul, if we read the latter line,

His must be wrong, whose morals are not right.

For it certainly must be defective either in Sincerity—Comprehension—or Impression.

THERE hath been, from time to time, a great deal of noise made in the christian church about *sound Faith* and *sound Doctrines*. These things have been represented as of the utmost importance; and indeed, if we take them in the Apostle's sense, for a sincere belief in the gospel, as a divine institution for reforming mankind from sin, and engaging them in a conscientious discharge of all the duties of piety, righteousness, and purity, in expectation of a future judgment, and hope of eternal life, producing an earnest endeavour to conduct ourselves according to this faith—and a faithful representation of these truths to others, and exhortations to all suitable duties, it must be allowed by all impartial persons, that *soundness in the faith*, and *sound doctrine*, are of the first importance to the glory of God, and the good of mankind:—the Apostle justly represents them as such in this epistle.

BUT though the words have been borrowed from St. Paul, yet, unhappily, the
 sense

sense he used them in hath been overlooked, or wilfully misrepresented, and the terms abused to very bad purposes. Instead of being appropriated to those doctrines which enjoin us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope, even the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, and which inculcate the graces and duties suited to each age, sex, relation, circumstance, and event of life, which are those that the Apostle calls sound doctrines, this character has been misapplied to certain abstruse, subtle, and metaphysical speculations, so curious and difficult as to be far above the understandings of the vulgar; although the Gospel declares itself to be an institution calculated by the divine wisdom for the common instruction and benefit of mankind, and not for the particular service of the learned and profound alone—altho' this gospel was preached to the poor, and hath appeared to all men bringing salvation. Whereas these subtilties have even involved the

the learned maintainers of them in an endless labyrinth of knotty controversy, out of which they have attempted in vain to extricate themselves by hard words and terms of art of no precise meaning, and by very ingenious and learned distinctions, fetched, in fact, rather from the schools of Aristotle, Plato, Zeno, and other heathen logicians, and from the scholastic divines in the dark ages of popery before the reformation, than from the plain practical lessons of Christ and his Apostles. According as these words have been used, it hath been a matter of extreme difficulty to be *sound in the faith*, or to teach *sound doctrine* with understanding; and, in fact, the soundness of most of those who have made the highest pretences to it, hath consisted in the use of a set of words, and forms of speaking which they little understood, and, indeed, are scarcely to be understood. Whereas, these things more properly belong to the class of what our Apostle calls *doctrines and commandments of men which turn away the truth* and prevent its salutary effect on the hearts and lives of mankind; and of *foolish ques-*

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tions and contentions, which he pronounceth unprofitable and vain, and chargeth Titus to avoid.

Two ill consequences have followed upon the abuse of these expressions of St. Paul.

1. THAT the misapplying the character of *sound doctrine and sound faith*, to a system of subtile and speculative notions, hath had a fatal tendency to divert the attention of christians, from that which is their great business and duty—purifying themselves from all sinfulness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God, to make them more concerned about *thinking right*, than *living well*—to be proud of their supposed knowledge, and careless of their dispositions and conduct.

2. WHENCE hath followed this other bad consequence—that earnestly to teach and inculcate the practical duties and motives of sound morality and genuine christianity, hath been decried and discouraged as a suspicious symptom of unsoundness in the faith;
though

though St. Paul so expressly declares in this epistle, that herein consists the very essence of sound christian doctrine—that the grand end of christianity is to purify us from all sin, and make us sober, righteous, and godly; and that for this end Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify us unto himself, a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

SURELY, the time will come, at length, when christians will study christianity as it is taught in the New Testament; and will search carefully, and without prejudice, into the true sense and meaning of scripture words and expressions, and no longer presume to abuse them, to sanctify and gain credit to notions and doctrines quite different from the purposes for which the holy writers used them—as hath been shamefully practised in many and many more instances, besides this which we have been considering.—When that time shall come, I do not doubt, that the simplicity and excellence of the scheme of redemption by Jesus Christ, as it is taught in the gospel—the

spiritual genius and sanctifying power of the gospel to reform and save the world, and the wonderful accuracy and uniformity of the style and language of the new testament writers will appear with surprizing and pleasing evidence.

THE END